

FULVIA

Roman matrona and revolutionary

BORN: c. 85/80 B.C.E.; place unknown

DIED: 40 B.C.E.; Sicyon, Greece

CAUSE OF NOTORIETY: Fulvia led a military campaign against Octavian Caesar on behalf of her husband Marc Antony.

ACTIVE: 41-40 B.C.E.

LOCALE: Rome, later Perusia

SENTENCE: Exile to Greece

EARLY LIFE

Fulvia (FUHL-vee-ah) was born sometime during the early first century B.C.E. to Marcus Fulvius Flaccus Bambulus and Sempronia, daughter of Gaius Gracchus. Fulvia's first husband was the demagogue Clodius Pulcher. After his death in 52 B.C.E., Fulvia married Scribonius Curio, a tribune who supported Julius Caesar in his rise to power. When Scribonius died, Fulvia wed her third and most famous husband, Marc Antony. According to Plutarch, Fulvia was a woman who was not interested in domestic tasks; she dominated Antony both at home and in his political actions.

POLITICAL CAREER

With Antony, Lepidus and Octavian Caesar formed the second Roman triumvirate in 44 B.C.E. Fulvia offered her daughter Clodia (Fulvia's daughter by Clodius Pulcher) in marriage to Octavian to strengthen the political alliance between Octavian and Antony. A short time later, the triumvirs Octavian (destined to become the first Roman emperor, Augustus), Lepidus, and Antony divided the Roman provinces among them. Octavian took charge of Italy, while Lepidus took the western provinces, and Antony sailed to Egypt. There Antony met the Egyptian queen Cleopatra VII and began an affair with her.

While Antony was in Egypt, Fulvia was representing his political interests in Rome. Octavian was planning to redistribute lands within Italy to the veteran soldiers who had supported him during his rise to power. Fulvia wanted to delay the redistribution of land until Antony returned from Egypt and asked the veterans to support Antony. Octavian divorced Clodia and started a propaganda campaign against Fulvia.

Fulvia eventually decided to take military action against Octavian. She and her brother-in-law Lucius Antonius raised eight legions of Roman troops to support Antony against Octavian's power grab. According to Dio Cassius, Fulvia personally led troops against Octavian's forces in early battles. Her army was able to occupy the city of Rome only for a short time before it was driven out and retreated to the city of Perusia. Octavian laid siege to Perusia during the winter of 41-40 B.C.E. and eventually starved Fulvia and her troops into surrendering.

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LEGAL ACTION AND OUTCOME

During Fulvia's campaign against Octavian, Octavian held a gathering of war veterans that turned into a de facto trial, at which Octavian convinced the veterans and his followers that Fulvia and Antony were traitors to Rome. After the siege of Perusia, Fulvia surrendered and was exiled to Sicyon on the Gulf of Corinth, where she fell ill and died while Antony was on his way to meet her.

IMPACT

In a time when women were expected to run the household and raise children, Fulvia was not only able to raise an army; she also was remembered for it. The fact that she is the first nonmythological woman featured on Roman coins speaks of her importance. History considers her a traitor only because she happened to be on the losing side. If Antony and his supporters had carried the day, Fulvia may well have been honored as a heroine by the Romans.

FURTHER READING

- Bauman, Richard A. *Women and Politics in Ancient Rome*. New York: Routledge, 1992. A study of women's involvement in and influence over politics and society in antiquity.
- Fraschetti, Augusto, ed. *Roman Women*. Translated by Linda Lappin. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001. A collection of essays of influential Roman women.
- Hemelrijk, Emily A. *Matrona Docta: Educated Women in the Roman Elite, from Cornelia to Julia Domna*. New York: Routledge, 1999. Explores the opportunities available to upper-class Roman women (including Fulvia) to acquire an education.
- Kleiner, Diana E. E., and Susan Matheson, eds. *I, Claudia: Women in Ancient Rome*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Art Gallery, 1996. A comprehensive study of women as depicted in Roman art.
- Pomeroy, Sarah B., ed. *Women's History and Ancient History*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina